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STUDIES IN GOTHIC FICTION

The Age of Lovecraft, edited by Carl H. Sederholm and Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock, U of Minnesota P, 2016. 256 pages, \$24.95. ISBN 978-0-8166-9925-4
by Jesús E. Navarro-Stefanón

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The Age of Lovecraft begins with a foreword of the famous British author Ramsey Campbell about Lovecraft's influence in the arts. Departing from the influence and popularity that Lovecraft has presently enjoyed, the editors, Carl H. Sederholm and Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock, propose key points of the book. "Lovecraft and Philosophy" reviews Lovecraft's relevancy in the principal current of the academy. "Speculative Realism and New Materialisms" raises the importance of Lovecraft for the philosophy of the twenty-first century in philosophers of speculative realism as Graham Harman inside the field of the object-orientated. "Posthumanism" is a central point in the book that proposes that we are in an age where the human being is displaced, which coincides with the cosmicism in the work of Lovecraft (6-8). "Popular Culture Presence" checks the influence that popular culture has had on Lovecraft's work in the arts and literature and it even refers to the adjustments of characters for television, such as Cthulhu's case in *South Park*. "Riding the Zeitgeist" indicates that Lovecraft has influenced both the literary canon of the mainstream and the culture of the Gothic, as well as so-called "nerdism". "Critical Questions and Future Directions" considers aspects of racism in Lovecraft, the style of his prose, and new directions. In "The Age of Lovecraft," Sederholm and Weinstock emphasize Lovecraft's works that relate to the destiny of civilization since Lovecraft questions the importance of the human opposite to the outside.

In "Ghoulis Dialogues," James Kneale analyzes the allusion, the space, and the modernity in the weird geography in Lovecraft's work, based on the categories proposed in the work *Weird Realism*, by Graham Harman. Kneale emphasizes

the importance of the weird style of Lovecraft in relation to the techniques of allusion and in "Cubism," as suggested by Harman.

From a more Gothic perspective, in "Lovecraft's Things," Weinstock observes some elements in the Lovecraftian narrative. Inside the sinister souvenirs that arise from the Gothic, Weinstock examines the castle, which represents the space in stories, as in "The Rats in the Walls;" the Gothic portrait, which reflects the human form, though in Lovecraft's work it goes beyond the human being, as in "Pickman's Model;" and the forbidden book as represented with the *Necronomicon*. Weinstock also mentions the machine of "From Beyond," which allows human beings to see other dimensions, and he concludes that in Lovecraft's Gothic narrative human beings are reduced to things, which returns to the origin of horror (76).

For her part, in "Hyper-Cacophony," Isabella van Elferen studies the implications in the speculative realism of sound and music, related to mathematics, in Lovecraft's stories. She names *hyper-cacophony*, the effect of which in Lovecraft's stories is to make "his universe echo with sounds that are inaudible, with timbres that are physically impossible, with music that is unimaginable even for an unearthly musicologist" (90).

In "Prehistories of Posthumanism," Brian Johnson compares Ridley Scott's *Alien* and *Prometheus* with the influence of Lovecraft's cosmic indifferentism, or cosmicism, in these films, particularly in *Prometheus*. Johnson thinks that, in *Prometheus*, there exists an intention of subduing the human being before these foreign creatures, which leads

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to the field of the posthuman as well as to an ecological conscience.

On the same topic of posthumanism, in “Race, Species, and Others,” Jed Mayer explores in an alternative way Lovecraft’s racial prejudices; he writes, “one that subverts constructions of human uniqueness and superiority” (119). Mayer reviews other intelligent beings in Lovecraft’s narrative, including some hybrids, such as the Deep Ones in *The Shadow over Innsmouth*, especially with regard to the transformation of the protagonist, Robert Olmstead, or the advanced Great Race of Yith in *The Shadow Out of Time*, a story in which there was an experience of embodiment between Nathaniel Wingate Peaslee and a member of the Great Race.

In another diverse subject, in “H. P. Lovecraft’s Reluctant Sexuality,” Carl H. Sederholm observes the sexuality in Lovecraft’s life and later focuses on the feminine characters in his work. Sederholm analyzes the description of Lavinia Whateley in “The Dunwich Horror” and affirms that “Lavinia is therefore not a passive vessel, but a horrific means of spreading the awful abjection of Dunwich precisely through the power of sexual reproduction” (143). He concludes that scholars should consider the embodiment and importance of the human body and abjectness in Lovecraft’s work.

Another interesting chapter of the book is the essay, “H. P. Lovecraft and Real Person Fiction,” by David Simmons. Simmons analyzes Lovecraft as a personage of fiction, from his time period up to the present day, by means of the cultural fan (or “following” to Henry Jenkins), not only in literature but especially in comics, graphical novels, and movies.

In the field of fan culture, in “A Polychrome Study,” Jessica George explores Lovecraft’s influence on diverse authors of popular culture, to compare the human limits in the story, “A Study in Emerald,” by Neil Gaiman. She comments that Gaiman’s work is based on “A Study in Scarlet,” by Arthur Conan Doyle since the prominent figures are Holmes and Watson, compared to Moriarty and Moran as Gothic doubles. They face creatures of the Lovecraftian pantheon, though George drives this clash towards the posthuman.

The next essay is “Lovecraft: Suspicion, Pattern Recognition, Paranoia,” by David Punter. In this essay, Punter juxtaposes the Gothic tradition with the Enlightenment and

he focuses on the term *apophenia* (recognition of patterns as a result of schizophrenia) to interpret Lovecraft’s work.

In “Lovecraft’s Cosmic Ethics,” Patricia MacCormack proposes that Lovecraft’s work guides diverse configurations of the differences between minorities, regarding life from a more cosmic ecological point of view. She analyzes it in works related to Randolph Carter (199).

In the last chapter “Lovecraft, Witch Cults, and Philosophers,” W. Scott Poole analyzes Lovecraft’s perspective on witchcraft in New England, but he criticizes that it has been based on Margaret Murray’s works, and this resulted in Lovecraft racializing them. Later, Poole explores Lovecraft’s racism, though it seems to me that he neglects many chronological aspects of his sources. He also reviews philosophers such as Harman.

Finally, the book concludes with an interview by Weinstock of China Miéville. Miéville tells his experience regarding role-playing games (RPGs) and other games, his place as author in the “new Lovecraft circle,” the way in which Lovecraft seems to conceive time, his influence in popular culture, and the commercialism and importance of Lovecraft for scholars of posthumanism.

The Age of Lovecraft provides a new insight for scholars, fans, and the general readership on Lovecraft’s work, from the perspective of posthumanism, Gothic literature, and fan culture. The essays in this collection serve readers in better understanding Lovecraft’s cosmicism and his transcendence into a popular culture icon. This compilation of interesting essays catches the reader’s attention from the beginning and encourages a reevaluation of the Lovecraftian narrative from a twenty-first-century perspective.